

84
A
SERMON

Preach'd at the Church of

St. Mary le Bow,

TO THE

SOCIETIES

FOR

Reformation of Manners,

Octob. 4. 1697.

By SAMUEL BRADFORD,
Rector of the said Church.

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TO THE
SOCIETIES
FOR
Reformation of MANNERS,
In the Cities of
London and Westminster.

1793 3/6 (2007)
A S I first Preach'd, so I now Print
the following Sermon at Your
Request; though I am sensible
that I can add nothing new, to
what hath been already Publish'd by my
Brethren, who went before me on this Oc-
A 2 cation;

The Dedication.

casion; from whom You have had that just Encouragement which Your Cause deserves, and those prudent Directions, which if You follow, You cannot err in the Management of it.

Notwithstanding which, I have been prevail'd upon, by considering that in such a Case as this, the concurring Judgment and Approbation of many who think and say the same thing, may the more effectually tend to the promoting Your Design, of which I freely own my self an Encourager, and shall think I have done a good Work, if any thing I have offer'd in this Discourse may contribute thereunto.

I have taken care in this Case to do nothing rashly or inconsiderately; but after having weigh'd, as well as I could, the Arguments for, and the Objections against Your Undertaking; the former of which do, in my Judgment, very much outweigh the latter.

That Vicious Men should declare openly against Your Attempt, is not at all to be

The Dedication.

be wonder'd at : 'Tis what they reckon their Interest, as well as their Inclination to do. And if some who are truly Virtuous and Pious, have entertain'd any Prejudices likewise, 'tis not very strange, since I believe hardly any Extraordinary and truly Generous Design was ever yet set on Foot in the World, but what was at the first suspected either as Imprudent, or Impracticable, by Men of otherwise good Judgment and Meaning.

However, there is this observable Difference between the Censures which Bad, and which Good Men pass upon You. The former do it from an Aversion to the End which you propose : The latter only doubt concerning the Means which you use ; Doubt, I say, for after all 'tis generally no more, they being rather shy of engaging themselves, than forward to censure those who do ; nay, they cannot but inwardly wish You good Success, whilst they forbear to assist You ; all which makes me conclude, that they are not perfectly inform'd of the Methods You take, or at least have not thoroughly consider'd them,
and

The Dedication.

and that when they have, they will alter their Judgments.

That open Prophaneness and Lewdness ought to be suppress'd, they agree with you ; (for what serious and good Man does not from his heart detest those scandalous Practices, which You endeavour to reform?) The only Question then is, How this may be effected? Now all that I would desire of such Persons at present is, that they will not object against the course You take, till they can themselves propose a better.

But after all, What can be plausibly objected against this, when, as the End is highly fit, nay, necessary to be pursued, so 'tis done by the Encouragement, and according to the Directions both of Divine and Humane Laws? So that what St. Paul saith in another Case, may be repeated in this, We know that the Law is good, if a Man use it lawfully. But of this I will add no more to what I have said in the Sermon it self.

Only

The Dedication.

Only upon this Occasion, I cannot forbear expressing my satisfaction, in observing two hopeful Prognosticks of a Better Generation to succeed the Present.

One is, that Spirit of Genuine and Primitive Christianity, which hath of late so evidently exerted it self in considerable Numbers of the Establish'd Communion, especially of the younger sort of both Sexes; as appears not only by their attending the Publick Devotions, particularly the Holy Communion, with the greatest Seriousness and Reverence; but also by a true Christian Simplicity, Modesty, Humility, Charity, Zeal and Courage, which, those who have occasion more intimately to converse with them, have frequently observ'd among them.

The other is, that Zeal mixt with Prudence, which so many both of the Establish'd Communion, and of those who in some few things differ from them, have jointly exprest, towards the suppressing of Vice.

And

The Dedication.

And I cannot but look upon it as the Duty of those of our Function, to lay hold of every Opportunity of encouraging and directing Persons, who are of themselves so well dispos'd.

That it may please Almighty God to bless and prosper these good Beginnings, and to give success to your honest and worthy Endeavours, is the hearty Prayer of,

Your faithful Friend and Servant,

SAMUEL BRADFORD.

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Ezra X. *Part of the 3d. and the 4th. Verse.*

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Now therefore let us make a Covenant
with our God, ---according to the
Counsel of my Lord, and of those
that tremble at the Commandment
of our God, and let it be done ac-
cording to the Law. Arise, for this
matter belongeth unto thee; we also
will be with thee; be of good cou-
rage, and do it.

gra
SUCH is the Fulness of the Holy
Scripture, both with respect to
Directions and Precepts, as well
as Instances and Examples, that
in whatever Case we seriously con-
sult them, we cannot want either the
one, or the other, for our Guidance and
Encouragement. And accordingly I hope
to make it appear, that the Words,
B which

which I have now read, are very well adapted to the Cause of our present Meeting.

The Occasion of them was this. The *Jews* having been detain'd in Captivity during the space of Seventy Years, it pleas'd God at last, according to what he had foretold by his Prophets, to stir up the Heart of the King of *Persia* to dismiss them to their own Countrey.

The first thing they did after their return, was, what very well became them, to prepare an Altar whereon to offer up their daily Sacrifices to the God of Heaven ; proceeding next to Rebuild their Temple ; which accordingly , notwithstanding the Opposition they met with from their Enemies, by the Blessing of God they Finish'd and Dedicated.

After these things, as we read *Chap. 7. Ezra*, the Writer of this Book, obtain'd a Commission from the *Persian* King to go up to *Jerusalem*, to set in order and supply what was amiss or wanting there ; particularly to Beautify the House of God, and to carry thither a very Noble Present from the King, and his Counsellors,

fellors, and the Province of *Babylon*, for the Service of the Temple, and of the God who dwelt therein; and not only so, but likewise to set *Magistrates and Judges* over the People, even such as knew the *Laws of God*; ordering also, That those who did not know them, should be taught by *Ezra* and his Brethren: To which large Commission this Sanction was annexed by the King, *Chap. 7. 26.* *Whosoever will not do the Law of thy God, and the Law of the King, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.*

That *Ezra* was a Person well qualified for receiving such a special Commission, is apparent, by the Character given of him in the same Chapter, where 'tis said, *ver. 6.* That he was a ready Scribe in the Law of *Moses*, which the Lord God of *Israel* had given. And *ver. 10.* that he had prepar'd his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in *Israel* Statutes and Judgements. And therefore the King himself, in his Letter

ter to him, salutes him, by the Title of *Priest and Scribe of the Law of the God of Heaven, ver. 12.*

The Office and Business of a *Priest* and *Scribe* among the *Jews*, was to preserve the Knowledge of God's Law, and to teach it to the People ; and accordingly the very Copy which we have of the Law of God, and of the Prophets in the Old Testament, is generally suppos'd to have been preserv'd and transmitted to us by this *Ezra*, together with the History of his own Times, wrote by himself.

Such a Man as this was qualified to Execute the King's Commission, according to the true intent of it, and is in this Case to be consider'd both as a *Priest* and a *Magistrate* in one Person.

In the sequel of the History we find he was faithful and punctual to the Orders he had receiv'd. He first chose out proper Companions, deliver'd the Offerings into their hands, kept a solemn Fast with them, in order to the imploring the Protection of God in the way they were going ; arriv'd safely at
Jerusalem,

of Jerusalem, and after Three days Rest,
of deliver'd up his Charge, and produc'd
his Commission, as we read Chap. 8.

est But when this was done, some of the
re Chief of the Jews came to him, and in-
nd form'd him of a great Transgression
d- which divers of their Nation had been
ve and were still guilty of. Thus we read
ets Chap. 9. 1, 2. *The Princes came to me,*
p- *saying, The people of Israel and the priests,*
nf- *and the Levites have not separated them-*
th *selves from the people of the lands, do-*
by *ing according to their abominations: — For*
to *they have taken of their daughters for*
d- *themselves, and for their sons; so that*
in *the holy seed have mingled themselves*
est *with the people of those lands; yea, the*
nd *hand of the princes and rulers hath been*
Dr- *chief in this trespass.* Where we see,
ose that some of the *Princes* themselves,
he those who were Men of Chief Note and
nn Place among the Jews, did not think it
lo- below them to turn *Informers* in a case
he of this Nature, however scandalous that
at Term may appear to some in our days.
m, Nay, observe their *Impartiality* and their
Courage at once; they did this, when some

of their own Rank and Quality, when the *Princes and Rulers*, were chief among the Transgressors.

Upon this *Information*, *Ezra*, like a Pious and Good Man, in the first place exprest his Sense of this Evil Practice, by all the Signs which were customary among that People. For *ver. 3. he rent his garment, and his mantle, and pluckt off the hair of his head, and of his beard, and sat down astonied*; which when the people saw, 'tis said, *ver. 4. That everyone that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, assembled unto him.* Both he and all who had a sense of the Authority of God's Law, were, it seems, deeply affected with the Transgression of their Countreymen; they did not account it a slight matter to observe the Iniquity of others, though themselves were innocent, but laid it very seriously to heart.

Thus he sat till the time of the *Evening Sacrifice*, and then, as it became the *Priest* of the Lord, *ver. 5. he fell upon his knees, spread out his hands unto God, and made Supplication for the People.* You may read his Prayer at your leisure,
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in the remaining part of that Chapter; in which he represents in very pathetical Expressions, the Goodness and Patience of God on the one hand, with the Ingratitude and Disingenuity of the *Jews* on the other hand.

What follow'd upon this Prayer of *Ezra* we have in this Chapter, (*Chap. 10.*) out of which my Text is taken; where we read, *Ver. 1.* That *when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God,* (observe all along what a sense this Good Man had of publick Trespasses) *there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men, and women, and children; for the people wept very sore.* If the *Magistrates* and the *Priests* set themselves heartily to reform Impiety and Wickedness, the *People* are apt to be influenced more than would easily be imagined without a trial. 'Twas so in this Instance, and I doubt not but it will be so, where ever the Experiment is fairly made.

Well! out of this Multitude one stood up, *Ver. 2.* *Shechaniah* by Name, *the son*

of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, and he answered and said unto Ezra, *We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.* There is, in truth, always hope, where People are disposed towards Repentance and Amendment; the Infinite Goodness of the Divine Nature is a sufficient ground of Hope, whensoever we render our selves capable of Mercy. He speaks in the Plural Number, *We have trespassed*, doing it in the Name of the People, though he was not himself guilty, as appears highly probable from the 26th Verse of this Chapter, where among the guilty, who are reckoned by Name, this *Shechaniah* is not mentioned, though both his Father *Jehiel*, and five of his Father's Brethren are nam'd among those that had taken strange Wives: So that he was not barely innocent in this matter, but *remarkably* so, as not having been tempted and drawn in by the Authority or Example of his nearest Relations. And indeed such an one it well becomes to appear forward in a business

of

of this nature, who is himself perfectly clear of those Vices he would reform in others; he will with the better Grace, and the juster Assurance act in such a Case.

But what was it, which he advis'd? Why, that we have in the words of my Text; *Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God, &c.*

Thus I have led you to the Text, by giving a very particular account of the Occasion of it; because throughout this whole History there are, as you may have observ'd, many fair hints given us to our present purpose. In the reading of it, I purposely omitted one passage in the third Verse, which expresses the particular Reformation which was to be made at that time, *viz. to put away all the Wives, (that is, their strange Outlandish Wives) and such as were born of them;* because we are not directly concern'd in the Law which was given to the *Jews* with respect to that matter. When God chose out the *Israelites* for his peculiar People, he saw it necessary to make a Separation between them and the Heathen, especially

ally the old Inhabitants of the Land of *Canaan*, lest they should be drawn into the Sin of Idolatry, to which they were so extremely prone; and this he did by many express Laws to that purpose, among which this was one, Deut. 7. 3. *Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.* This was judg'd so necessary for that People, that such Marriages were not only utterly unlawful to be made by them, but were null if they were made; as appears by the History of this matter, both in the Books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*. And if God, who is the Supreme Lord and Governor of the World, saw it fit to give a such a Law, there can be no dispute concerning their Duty to comply with it. However, this being only a *Positive*, not a *Moral* Law, it is obligatory to no other People but to those to whom it was given; although perhaps it may not misbecome any Nation whatsoever, professing true Religion, to forbid Marriage with Idolaters, by a Law of their own, for fear of the ill Consequences of it; As
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in one instance, namely, that of our Princes, our Law-makers have now thought fit to do, after a long and dangerous Experience we have had of the Evils that attend such Alliances. But that by the way. It may suffice to our present purpose, that the *Jews* had been guilty of a notorious Transgression of the Divine Law given to them, and therefore were obliged to reform themselves in that particular.

But to come to the Words themselves, as they may concern us, as well as the *Jews*. *Now therefore, &c.* You may observe in them these *Six* Particulars.

1. That in the Case of publick and prevailing Transgression, it was thought fit for the *Israelites* to associate and combine together, to engage themselves and one another, to endeavour a Reformation of the Manners of their Country. *Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God;* that is, let us solemnly oblige our selves and one another, as one Body, thus to do.

2. That they were influenc'd to do thus, and directed in their doing it, by those

those who had the Knowledge of God's Law, a Reverence for his Authority, and a Fear of his Power and Justice. *According to the counsel of my Lord*, that is, of Ezra, who was a Scribe of the Law of God, and perfectly instructed in it; *and of those that tremble at the Commandment of God*; that is, let us do thus, according to the Advice thou hast already intimated to us by thy Humiliation, Confession, and Prayer, with the concurrence of all such as have join'd with thee in humbling themselves, and begging the Favour of God, as being sensible of his Displeasure, and fearing the effects of it.

3. That the Law of God, and of their Country, was propos'd as the Rule by which their whole proceeding in this Case should be guided. *Let it be done according to the Law*; that is, let the Law of God given by *Moses* be our Rule.

4. That this Work of Reformation was reckon'd to be the more especial Charge and Business of those, who presided and govern'd both in Church and State. *Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee;*

as

as if he had said, Thou art both qualified and commission'd to direct and command us in this business, as having the Skill and the Authority both of a *Priest* and *Magistrate*.

5. That the People also, in their respective Stations, and according to their several Capacities, were resolv'd to assist and encourage their Governors, in whatsoever Attempts they should make to this purpose. *We also will be with thee; be of good courage.* He might well promise this for himself; and seeing the behaviour of so great a Multitude, he might reasonably presume the same for them, that each of them would afford his assistance to *Ezra* in so good, so laudable, and so necessary an Undertaking.

6. That open confessing publick Iniquities, and Supplicating for the Mercy of God, and for Grace to amend what was amiss, was not thought sufficient to excuse either the Priests, or the Magistrates, or the People, from doing their parts towards the obtaining what they desir'd. *Arise, be of good courage, and do it; that is, Having now kneel'd before God,*

God, and offer'd up thy Supplications, Arise, stand up, and do what farther becomes thee; and let neither the Number, nor the Considerableness of any Transgressors among us discourage thee; thou wilt not want the Assistance either of God or Man.

The Time allotted for such a Discourse as this, will not permit me to enlarge upon any of these Observations; yet forasmuch as I think them all apposite to our present Design, I shall endeavour briefly to illustrate each of them, and as I go along, apply them to the Purpose of this Assembly.

1. It is observable, That in the case of publick and prevailing Transgression, it was thought fit for the *Israelites* to Associate and Combine together, to engage themselves, and one another, to endeavour a Reformation of the Manners of their Country. *Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God.*

There had been an open violation of an exprefs Law of God, of which several of all Ranks among them had been guilty.
Now

Now in opposition to these, 'tis said, That *a very great congregation assembled unto Ezra out of Israel*; and *Shechaniah*, speaking both for himself and them, persuades to the entering into a solemn Obligation to amend what had been amiss among them.

And the like we find in other Instances in the Holy Scriptures. Thus when there had been a general defection from the Law of God immediately after it was given to *Moses*, by the Peoples making and worshipping the Golden Calf, *Moses*, after he had severely rebuked *Aaron* for complying with the Peoples folly, *stood in the gate of the camp*, and said, *Who is on the Lord's side, let him come unto me*; upon which 'tis said, that *all the sons of Levi gather'd themselves unto him*, *Exod. 32. 26*. 'Tis true, the way in which they proceeded against the Transgressors, is not to be imitated by us, such Methods being proper for that People, as are not for all others: But the *Levites* joining together as one Body, to do what God and *Moses* should direct them, towards the suppressing the Idolatry which nad so suddenly

suddenly and so generally prevail'd, was what very well became them, and deserves our imitation.

I might again instance in what was done in the Reign of King *Josiah*, 2 Kings 22.8. Upon the High Priest's finding the Book of the Law, and sending it to the King, he found by perusing it, that the Nation had notoriously transgressed the Precepts given therein, and were thereby exposed to the just displeasure of Almighty God; upon which, *Chap. 23. 1, 2, 3.* *He immediately sent, and gathered unto him all the Elders of Judah, and of Jerusalem; and he went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the Priests, and the Prophets, and all the people both small and great, and he read in their ears all the words of the book; and the King made a Covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his Commandments, and his Testimonies, and his Statutes, with all their heart, and with all their soul; — and all the people stood to the Covenant; in vertue of which, (as it follows in that Chapter) such a Reformation*

Reformation was made, as had not been from the days of *Moses*, to that time.

And such a Practice is very reasonable; there being no other way likely to suppress Wickedness, when it is grown to an head, but for a considerable Body of such especially as are untainted with it, to set themselves in open opposition and defiance to it. Single Attempts will prove too weak in such a case; whereas the joint and unanimous Endeavours of many, who will encourage and assist one another, will make Iniquity both ashamed and afraid to shew it self.

And upon this account, I cannot but justify and commend your having form'd your selves into orderly and regular Societies, for the more effectual carrying on that good Work which you have undertaken. 'Tis no other thing than what is constantly done without offence in Cases of *Secular* Concernment; Prudence teaching, and Experience confirming, as Men of Business in the World do well know, that no useful Design is so advantageously and thoroughly carried on by *single* Persons, as by *Companies*. How many Cor-
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poration

porations are for that reason embodied throughout this Kingdom, for the carrying on particular Trades and Professions? Nay, how many meer Voluntary Societies are formed Yearly in this City, and assemble in this Church, as you now do, for the promoting good Correspondence and Friendship among Neighbours or Countrymen? And why should we not be as wise, and as zealous, in promoting the Honour of God, the Interests of Religion, the Spiritual and Eternal Welfare of Mankind, nay, and the best Interests of the Kingdom we belong to, as we are in promoting any of our Secular Interests or Designs? No other reason, that I know of, can be assigned why we are not so, but because *the Children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.*

Nor can I see any just Exception to be made against your Societies in particular, rather than against any of the rest; since upon due Enquiry I am well satisfied, that they are under the Encouragement and Direction of Persons, whose Prudence, as well as Piety, is unquestionable; and
since

since your Proceedings are guided by the Laws both of God and Man. But of that more under the following Observations.

2. In the next place therefore, I observ'd from the Text, that the *Israelites* were influenc'd to take this Course, and directed in their doing it, by those who had the knowledge of God's Law, a reverence for his Authority, and a fear of his Power and Justice. For so the Text says, *Let us make a covenant with our God,—according to the counsel of my lord, (namely of Ezra) and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God.*

It was by the Suggestion of *Ezra*, and those who join'd with him in his Humiliation and Prayer, that *Shechaniah* made this Motion; and it was a thorough acquaintance with the Law of God, which mov'd *Ezra*; as it was a just fear of God's Displeasure, and an awful reverence toward his Majesty (express'd by *trembling at the commandment of God*) which excited the Congregation. And there can be no doubt, but that all who were concern'd for this Reformation,

tion , and thus excited to attempt it, were ready to follow the Directions of *Ezra* , and to be guided by the prudent Counsels of the wisest and best men among them , in the prosecuting their Design.

They were the very same Principles which stir'd up *Josiah* , in that other case I mention'd. It was his *reading the book of the Law* , which had , it seems, been utterly neglected, and almost lost from among them , that put the King upon sending to enquire of God, what he should do ; *2 Kings* 22. 11, 12, 13. who in his Answer to him, commends him , for that *his heart was tender , and he humbled himself before the Lord, when he heard what he had said*, in that Book. ver. 19.

An awful regard for the Law of God, and a tender-hearted, humble, and affectionate Concern for its being obey'd both by our selves and others, are Dispositions highly commended in the sacred Writers. *To this Man will I look*, saith God by his Prophet *Isaiah* , *Isa.* 66. 2. *Even to him who is poor, and of a contrite*

a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.
 And 'tis nothing but the want of such
 a Temper, that can make Men either
 go on carelessly in violating God's Laws
 themselves, or behold others doing so,
 without using their Endeavours to re-
 claim them.

For God is infinitely above us, and
 we are intirely at his disposal, as being
 the Work of his Hands, and under the
 constant care of his Providence; so that
 'tis very fit, that he should give us Laws,
 and that we should reckon our selves un-
 der the strictest Obligations to be govern'd
 by them.

How can the wilful and obstinate
 Offender think to escape unpunish'd,
 whilst he violates those Laws which are
 Establish'd by indisputable Authority,
 backt with uncontrollable Power?

But that which should yet farther en-
 gage our Reverence towards them, is,
 That they are founded also upon the
 eternal and unalterable Rules of Justice
 and Equity. 'Tis true, there were sever-
 al *positive* Laws given by *Moses* to the
Jews, which are usually said to be there-

fore good, because commanded ; (though to that People, and in those Circumstances, God, no doubt, knew that it was good to give them ;) and 'tis remarkable, that it was even one of those *positive* Laws, which *Ezra* and the People that join'd with him shew'd such a regard to at that time. How inexcusable then are we, if we do not Reverence those Laws, which God hath given us in the very *Frame and Constitution of our Nature*, and which we can never transgress, without contradicting the Reason and Sense of our own Minds, and Violating our Consciences !

And such in truth are the Laws, for the Execution of which you now contend ; *Viz.* Those whereby we are oblig'd to Reverence the Name of Almighty God, to observe some certain fixt Times for his Publick Worship and Service, to preserve our selves sober and chaste, free from those Defilements and Disorders of the Flesh, which would be to our own great prejudice, and the scandal of our Neighbours. Who can doubt, whether such Laws as these ought to be

be esteem'd sacred or not? And consequently 'tis not to be wonder'd at, if those among us who daily converse with the Holy Scriptures, as well as with their own Minds, and are acquainted with the Precepts written both in the one and the other, and have at the same time a regard for the Authority of Almighty God, and *tremble at his word*, should unite their Endeavours against the open and gross violation of them.

3. But 'tis farther observable in the Text, That the Law of God, and of their Countrey, was propos'd as the Rule by which their whole proceeding in this case should be guided. *And let it be done according to the Law.*

The Law of *Moses* was to the *Jews* both the Law of God, and the Municipal Law of their Countrey too. God was their King, and gave them their Laws immediately from Heaven, and therefore 'twas fit they should have recourse to these, whenever they set upon a Publick Reformation.

As to other Nations, which are not so immediately under a Divine Legisla-
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tion,

tion, there are first the Law of God given to Mankind in the very frame of their Nature, and resulting from the Reason of Things, which oblige all the Children of Men, as being publish'd to all; and whereever God hath given any *positive* Laws over and above, those to whom they are publish'd are equally obliged by them also. And in all other cases, the Municipal Laws of each Countrey, so far as they do not contradict the Divine, are to be a Rule to all Ranks and Orders of men therein, especially with respect to all their actions of Publick Concernment and Importance. For they are made by an Authority deriv'd from God, as all lawful humane Power is; and they are the very Bonds and Ligaments of Society, which at first unite, and afterwards hold men in one Body; they are plainly the Conditions upon which any Countrey or Kingdom agree and oblige themselves to act. And therefore nothing can be more imprudent or dangerous to a Community, than either to make Laws that are not fit to be executed, or not to see to the Execution of those that are made. As

As to our own Country, thanks be to God, we live under the Direction of wise and wholesome Laws, and particularly those Laws of our Countrey which you endeavour to have executed, are such as are undoubtedly agreeable to the Laws of God.

As for instance; Do the Laws of our Realm strictly forbid and punish all *prophane Swearing and Cursing*? Does not the Law of *Moses*, and of *Christ*, nay of *Nature* it self, do the same?

Do the Laws of our Countrey appoint a certain *Day* for the publick solemn Worship of Almighty God? God by *Moses* did the same to the *Jews*; and our Blessed Saviour and his Apostles have by their Example obliged us Christians to the like practice; and this also very agreeably to the Light of Nature, and the Dictates of right Reason.

Do the Laws of this Kingdom restrain the exorbitances of an *intemperate* and *unclean* Life, inflicting Penalties upon those that either abuse themselves, or corrupt others in these matters? No man who reads the Holy Scriptures of
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the Old and New Testament, or consults the Dictates of his own Conscience, can be ignorant, that this is agreeable to the Will of God discover'd both by *Nature* and *Revelation*.

Now I would fain know, why we, who are so jealous with respect to the Honour of our Laws in all other cases, should not be at least equally so in the cases I have now mention'd. Are those Laws only fit to lie dormant, which were design'd directly for the maintaining and promoting *Piety* and *Virtue* among us? Is it fit to exact those Penalties which our Laws inflict, where one man injures another in his Estate or his Reputation? But not where our Maker is openly affronted and injured by his Creatures? Is it fit to put those Laws in Execution, which are made for the Safety or the Honour of our Prince? And not those also which are made for the Honour and the Interest of him who is *King of kings, and Lord of lords*? In a word; Can we with a good Conscience look on, and see no regard had to those Laws of our Country,

trety, which, if duly observ'd, would have a special Tendency to promote the spiritual good of our Brethren, as well as their temporal, and to preserve the good order, the peace, and the safety of the whole Body? There can, I am well assur'd, be no reply made in this case.

All therefore that I shall add upon this Head is, to put you in mind of what I know you have already among your Directions and Rules, *viz.* That whatsoever you do in this whole matter, be as our Text expresses it, *done according to the law*; that you never in the least exceed its bounds and measures; but on the other hand, that you allow for every reasonable and equitable consideration, ever inclining rather to the side of *Charity* and *Mercy*, than of rigid *Justice*.

But to proceed;

4. This Work of Reformation was reckon'd to be the more especial Charge and Business of those who presided and govern'd both in Church and State. *Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee;*

thee ; speaking to *Ezra* , who as he was a *Priest of God* , and a *Scribe of his Law* , so he came also with a *Special Commission* from the *Persian Monarch* .

As to the *Priests* of God , and the *Scribes* of his Law , there can be no doubt made. The Law is given to them in especial Charge , and they are to make it their constant endeavour to instruct the People in it , and by all means to persuade and excite to a faithful Obedience to it.

And as to *Governors* or *Magistrates* in the State , both Reason and Scripture assure us , That *rulers are not a terror to good works , but to the evil* ; that *they are the ministers of God to us for good* ; that *if we do that which is evil , we may be afraid of them* , because *they bear not the sword in vain , but are the ministers of God , revengers to execute wrath upon them that do evil* , Rom. 13. 3, 4. And again , That our *Governors* , whether *Supreme* or *Subordinate* , are sent by God for the punishment of evil-doers , and for the praise of them that do well , 1 Pet. 2. 13, 14. For which reason they are sometimes called

led *Gods*, because they are God's Vicegerents, having an Authority derived from the Great Lord and Governor of all. Their great Business therefore is, to promote the Honour of him whose Authority they are invested with, and whose Image they bear, together with the welfare and happiness of the People whom they govern, keeping all in good Order, so that under them their Subjects may lead not only *quiet and peaceable Lives*, but in all *Godliness and Honesty* also; which Ends cannot be attain'd without making and executing such Laws as may preserve and promote Piety and Virtue, the Fear of God, together with Justice and Sobriety among Men.

And as the Nature and Design of their *Office* require all this of them; so they are under a special Obligation to the doing of it, by the *Oath of God* with which they have bound themselves, which cannot sure be intended to engage them to the Observance and Execution of all the Laws of their Country, with an exception only of those, in which the Honour of God, and the Welfare of their Country

Country are most nearly and deeply interested.

Thanks be to God, there are many Magistrates among us, particularly in this City, who seem to have a good sense of this upon their Minds, and, to their Honour, have shew'd themselves forward upon all occasions to act accordingly. May God Almighty bless and reward their Endeavours, and increase their Number; and may he excite all Orders of Men among us, from the highest to the lowest, to engage heartily and zealously in so good a Work.

But the next Particular I observ'd in the Text was, That

5. The People also, in their respective Stations, and according to their several Capacities, were resolv'd to encourage and assist their Governors in whatsoever Attempts they should make to that purpose. *We also will be with thee; be of good courage.*

He who said this in his own Name and the Peoples, seems to have been neither *Priest* nor *Magistrate*, but one of the Common People, his Family being reckon'd

reckon'd a little after in this Chapter, (*Ver. 25, 26.*) among *the people of Israel* only; so that, as I observ'd in the beginning of this Discourse, That the *Princes* did not think it below them, to be *In-formers* in a Case of this nature; so it was not it seems look'd upon as an *Impertinent* or *Officious* Act, a meddling out of his *Sphere* or *Station*, for a *private* Man to encourage and assist *Ezra*, nay, to move and excite him to the Work of Reformation.

Nor indeed can any one who thoroughly considers this matter, easily fall into such a mistake. For besides that the Magistrate very often wants the encouragement of those that are under him, to excite his Vigour, and to strengthen his Hands in the Execution of Laws upon numerous, bold, wealthy, or great Offenders; it is moreover impossible in very many instances, that he should execute them at all, unless, according to the Design and Intimation of the Laws themselves, due Information be first given him against those that violate them, which must generally be the part of such among
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the Common People, as being themselves Innocent, yet are frequently conversant with Transgressors. In so much, that if a wise and good Magistrate should have never so great a share of Zeal and Courage, it would avail nothing, unless others do their part also.

But it may be said, Are there not better and easier Methods for carrying on a Publick Reformation, than for one Neighbour to inform the Magistrate against another; and such as a good-natur'd modest Man, and an humble Christian, would rather chuse to be engaged in?

I answer; There is no question, but that several other things may and ought to be done, in order to the reforming the Manners of a Nation. As particularly,

That every good Man should take especial care to give an Example of all manner of Virtue and Piety to others, that according to the Precept of our Blessed Saviour, Matth. 5. 16. *his light should so shine before men, that they may see his good works, and glorify his heavenly Father by an imitation of him.*

Moreover,

Moreover, that every Parent of Children, and Master of Servants, should carefully instruct and govern his Family, setting up the constant Worship of God in his House, instructing all that belong to him in the Principles of Religion, and obliging them to behave themselves regularly whilst they are under his care, according to the practice of *Abraham*, the *Father of the Faithful*, to whom God himself gave Testimony, *Gen. 18. 19.* That he knew him, that he would command his children, and his household after him, so that they should keep the way of the Lord, &c. And I doubt not, but that the want of this care in the Heads of Families, especially in this last Generation, has been a very great occasion of the Looseness of the present Age; and that this would be one very effectual means of mending the state of Things among us, if all those who are concern'd would conscientiously discharge their Duty in this respect. It would in a great measure prevent the care of the Magistrate, and render the Execution of Laws against Impiety and Immorality in a good degree needless.

A further means of Reformation would be, for every serious Christian to take the courage in all Company, where ever he hath a fair Occasion or Opportunity given him, to recommend Piety and Virtue, to run down Wickedness and Vice, and to reprove and rebuke, in modest and friendly manner, those whom he observes openly to transgress and offend; and if several in the same Company, who are themselves well disposed, would conspire to back and assist one another in so doing, I doubt not but that much good might be done this way.

And there is no question, but that every modest and good Man heartily wishes, that there were no need of any other method than these.

But after all, it must be said, That there are abundance of Cases, in which these Courses will not do the business; and where they will not, 'tis but reasonable, nay 'tis our Duty to proceed further; and if the good Nature and Modesty of any good Man should tempt him to neglect his Duty in such a Case, yet if he have an hearty Concern, and right Christian

Christian Zeal for the Honour of God, the Good of his Brother, and the Welfare of his Country, these will enable him to overcome his Reluctancy.

What those Cases are, Prudence and Experience will easily discover ; as particularly, when prophane and lewd Sinners are grown Bold and Impudent, so as to despise all Reproof, and spurn at Admonitions, being by use and practice so hardened, that nothing is like to interrupt them in their evil Courses, but the down-right Execution of wholesome Laws, by the Authority and Power of the Magistrate.

Our Blessed Saviour, who knew well how to rebuke, either mildly or sharply, as the Case requir'd, hath plainly signified to us, that there are some Sinners got beyond reproof, and not to be attempted that way, Matth. 7. 6. *Give not that which is holy to dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rent you.*

And in truth, the Practices which you have set your selves to reform, are

such; as nothing but an intolerable Contempt of all things Sacred, and an Abhorrence to Virtue and Sobriety can bring Men to.

Is it to be imagin'd, for instance, That those who keep lewd, or otherwise disorderly Houses, wherein all sorts of Men, and more especially the Youth of the Nation are corrupted, debauched, and ruin'd, both in Body, and Soul, and Estate, will be prevail'd upon to forego and quit their dishonest Gain by gentle and modest Reproofs? Or that those who have so far thrown off all Shame, as to frequent such places, will be withheld by meer persuasion?

Is it to be suppos'd that the Man, who has so far discarded Humanity, as frequently to render himself a Beast, in the view of all his Neighbours, and to be distinguish'd as he walks the Streets, only by being unable to retain the Posture of a Man, will be instructed into better Manners?

Is it, lastly, to be thought, that those who have so far abandon'd all regard either to God or Man, as frequently to
call

call upon their Maker to damn either themselves or their Brethren, will ordinarily take a Rebuke kindly at your hands? Or, that others who so despise Almighty God and his Worship, as openly to misuse his Sacred Name, and to prophane that Day which is set apart for his Service, in defiance to the express and plain Laws of God and their Country, will be reclaim'd by only telling them softly that they do amiss? I presume not, and if any one be of another Opinion, he is at liberty to make the Experiment.

If there be among any of these sorts, such as we may have reasonable hopes of, as perhaps some few who have contracted a vile Habit of prophaning the Name of God by Oaths, which they utter in Common Discourse unawares, these will either be reclaim'd when they see the Laws executed upon others, or else 'tis but fit that they should fall under the Penalty and the Shame themselves.

6. There is one Observation more which I made from the Text, and that

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is, That open confessing publick Iniquity, and praying for the Mercy of God, and for his Grace to amend what was amiss, was not thought sufficient to excuse either the Priest, or the Magistrate, or the People, from doing their parts towards the obtaining what they desir'd.

Ezra had been upon his Knees, confessing the Sins of the People, and imploring the Mercy and Favour of God towards them, in very pathetical Terms, and a large Congregation had join'd with him in all this; but this it seems was not enough; *Shechaniah* says to him, *Arise, be of good courage, and do it.* And accordingly we read, that he immediately took his Advice; for it follows, *v* 5. *Then Ezra arose*, namely, from off his Knees, *and made the Chief-Priests, and Levites, and all Israel to swear, that they should do according to this word; and they sware*; and according to this their Resolution and Oath they practised, as appears by the sequel of the History.

Prayer is one proper Means to avert the Displeasure of God from a sinful People, and hath been always used as such by Pious Men, when they have liv'd where Iniquity abounded, and very often with good success, as we find in divers Instances in the *Old Testament* : But if it be not accompanied with such Attempts and Endeavours as are within our power, and are evidently conducive to the same End, it may justly pass for the effect of Hypocrisy or Formality, and tend rather to provoke Almighty God, than to obtain his Favour toward us. For with what face can any one beg pardon of God for the Transgressions of the Nation he lives in, without doing his part towards the amending them? How can he desire that God would pour out a Spirit of Repentance and Reformation upon the Kingdom (which is probably one of the Petitions he offers up on such an occasion) unless he excite the same in himself, and others, as much as may be?

And now to apply this last Observation to our selves, and therewith to conclude

clude this Discourse. We have been for divers Years past offering up our Supplications to God ; we have had our stated days of Solemn Fasting and Humiliation to this purpose ; and among other things we have desir'd, That God would be pleas'd by his Grace to reform whatever has been amiss in the midst of us, as well as that he would deliver us from our Enemies, and avert the Evils our Sins had expos'd us to ; and hereby certainly we have laid our selves under a strict obligation of adding our Endeavours to our Petitions.

And we are farther engag'd at this time by way of Gratitude also, since it hath pleas'd God so far to answer our Requests, as to prevent those Evils we fear'd, and after a Tedious, Expensive, and Bloody War, (in the midst of which, Thanks be to God, we were deliver'd from feeling the severest effects of it) to restore to us the great Blessing of Peace.

Now what can we do less, after all this, than to make a vigorous Effort, to root out those Sins which ever did, and
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ever will endanger our Peace and Welfare, whilst they prevail among us? How can we better testify and express our Thankfulness to Almighty God, our Great Deliverer and Preserver; or our Concern for the continuance of Peace and Tranquillity to our Nation, than in this way? The present Gracious Dispensation of Providence is both a Motive and Encouragement to us thus to do.

Give me leave to speak freely upon this Occasion. We had once before in this Age a fair opportunity given us by Providence, for becoming a happy People; I mean when our Legal Government, and the Establish'd Church, were re-settled, upon the Peaceable Restoration of King *Charles* the Second.

But the remembrance of that Season is attended with a very melancholy Reflection, namely, how grossly we abused the Goodness of God, and turn'd his Grace into Wantonness. Instead of a wise and sober Improvement of so great a Blessing, 'tis too well known, that *rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness, strife and envying*, were the unhappy

unhappy Effects of our Peace and Prosperity at that time.

Neither can we be unacquainted, what a hand the Common Enemy has had in promoting Prophaness and Division among us ever since; as well knowing, that nothing could so effectually promote their Interests, as first dividing us into Parties, and then sowing the Seeds of Loosness and Licentiousness as much as was possible among each Party. We are not now ignorant of their Devices, and I hope our Experience will make us wiser and better for the time to come.

We are now tried by Providence once again, how we will demean our selves; and 'tis not, methinks, to be despair'd of, but that all who are serious, and well dispos'd in the Nation, may again unite and agree to promote the common Interests of our Religion, and our Country. It seems to me a good Omen, that God hath stir'd up the hearts of so many among us, to express a concern and zeal for the suppressing Impiety and Vice; and that in prosecuting this Excellent Design, many of our Dissenting Brethren
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are join'd with those of the Establish'd Communion. 'Tis to be hoped, that frequent conversing upon so good an Occasion as this, may be a means of removing all Unreasonable Prejudices, and by degrees may beget a better Understanding, and a more favourable Opinion of each other. If our Zeal were but once turn'd towards the great things of Religion, in which we all agree, I am persuaded that our Differences about less Matters would soon abate, and we might perhaps come to an agreement about them before we were aware.

But to let that pass. As far as we are agreed, *Let us walk by the same Rule, let us mind the same thing.* I mean, Let us with one consent promote the common Interests of our Religion, and the Virtue of the Nation, of which we are all Members. *Let us arise; be of good courage, and do it.*

I am very sensible, after all, that there are other Iniquities among us, besides those which the Law reaches, and such as are highly provoking to God, and dangerous to the Kingdom; particularly,
that

that base *selfishness* of Spirit which has so notoriously prevail'd and spread it self like a Leprosie, in all Parties, and in all Ranks of Men among us. This is, in great measure, out of the power of the Law, and the Magistrate, and must be left to God alone to rectify, though it be a publick, and a very scandalous Sin. But the Sins you have set your selves against, you have found by Experience may be in some measure control'd; and 'tis worth the while for every good Man to carry the matter as far as 'tis in his power.

And may that good God, who hath already done so great things for us, direct and prosper your farther Endeavours; may he, by the power of his Grace and good Spirit, stir up all Orders of men among us, to do their part towards the promoting the publick good, in this, and in all other cases; May he continue Peace and Tranquillity both to our Church and State; May he compose all our Differences, and make up our Breaches; May he bless and prosper his Church throughout the world, delivering
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all its oppressed Members, increasing Piety and Charity among all that profess the Christian Name : And lastly, May he cause Truth, Righteousness, and Peace, the fear of his holy Name, together with all Virtue and Goodness to be propagated in all parts of the Earth, that his Kingdom may come, and his will may be done on Earth as it is Heaven. Grant this, O heavenly Father, for thy Son Jesus Christ his sake, to whom with thee, and the Eternal Spirit, be all Honour and Glory now and for ever. Amen.

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